

Developing Fluency in Communication for Grade 2 Students



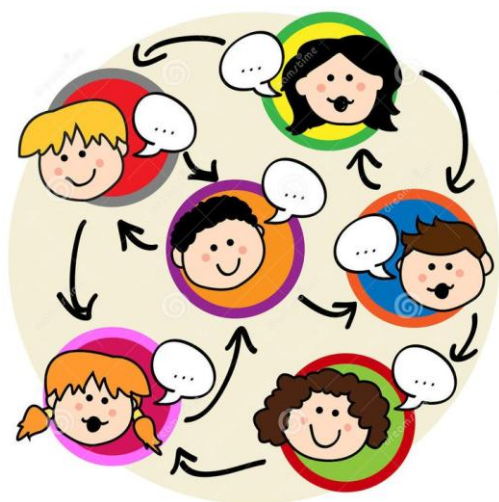
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- ◆ The difficult journey of a monological classroom to a dialogical classroom
- ◆ Failures and successes of situations and communications
- ◆ “Of all the hard jobs around, one of the hardest is being a good teacher.”

- Maggie Gallergher

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“Of all the hard jobs around, one of the hardest is being a good teacher.” Many teachers, like you and I, can relate to this truthful quote by Maggie Gallagher. The definition of a ‘good’ teacher has puzzled many educators and researchers for a long time since it can be defined in multiple ways. Likewise, it is equally difficult, if not more, to define a good student. Personally, for me, a ‘good’ student is one who will acknowledge the input received, but will also pose questions for deeper learning. However, this does not mean that quiet or inattentive students are ignored. The disparity of the two groups in my classes, class 1 and 4, has dropped significantly when comparing to the first half of the school year, where initially there were more quiet students than those who asked questions.

The Start of a New Journey: From Monological to Dialogical

There are many underlying reasons and factors that have caused the change, but most importantly it had to do with shifting the classroom to be dialogical or student-centered than a monological or teacher-centered. In a teacher-centered classroom, students’ focus is completely on the teacher, where teachers talk and students exclusively listen. Furthermore, during the activities, collaboration is minimal and students mainly work alone. On the other hand, when the classroom is student-centered, the focus is on both students and teacher, where students are able to voice out their opinions, pose questions and decide on what is right or wrong, while the teacher’s role is that of a facilitator who encourages classroom discussions for students to build on their existing

knowledge by sharing ideas and constructing new knowledge together. Therefore, a good classroom context permits students to be free and to strengthen their own learning, with teachers taking the backseat, but not excluding good instructions that consist of explanation and exposure.

Why did the change occur?

In both of my classes, explanation and exposure of the content were plentiful. Like the saying 'two sides of the same coin' goes, this had both a positive and a negative side. The explanation and exposure made it easy and accessible for students in both classes to complete any assignments given to them without taking errors and mistakes into consideration. However, it was a daunting task when students shared ideas or answered questions. In short, there were minimal communicative and constructive activities occurring in the classroom.

I was unhappy with the outcome and didn't like this particular, negative side of the coin. When looking back to the first two terms, communication was minimal; however, the evident communication was only seen between A students and me. Anybody present in the classroom, whether a teacher observer, the homeroom teacher or even I who stood in front of every class could see that over half of the students were left out because they lacked the necessary vocabulary as well as repetition to instill the speaking skills. At this point, it was difficult to climb the mountain and attain communicative skills since there was a massive language barrier. This was because the expectation set seemed

impossible for most students to reach. I was unsatisfied because each time questions were asked only some students and the same students could answer.

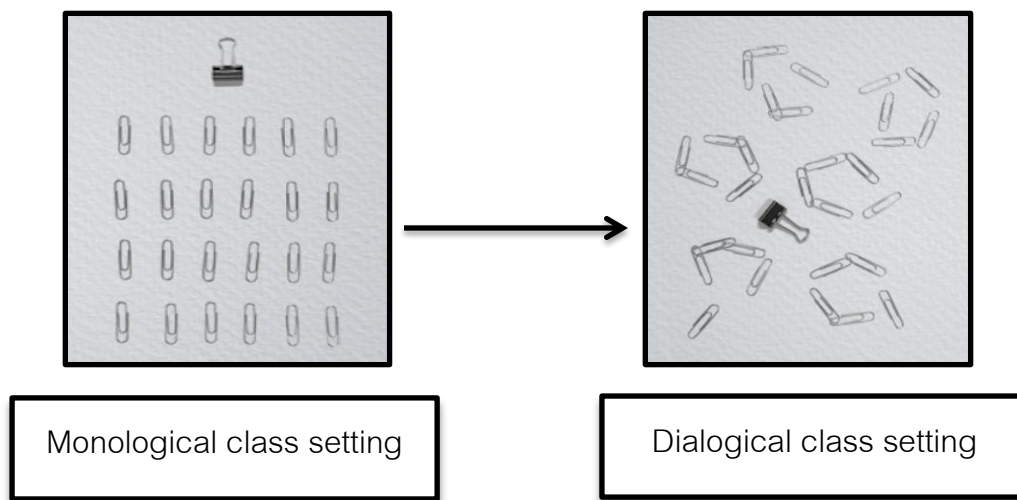
Everybody is different! So, embrace your individuality!

This is where my value came into play or moreover where I believed that the time had come to be fair and there should be justice in the class. I wanted to be fair and reasonable to everyone and this meant accepting that not every student could give answers to questions completely and correctly. Every student learns differently and it is important to acknowledge that everyone has different learning styles in the class. I link my value by having activities that allow for fairness. The activities vary from group work, pair work and at times individual work so that every individual's needs are catered. Furthermore, when it comes to my teaching, the main thing that I want to see happening is not only having a few attentive students, but also making sure weak students are able to understand the topics and are able to respond to questions. This does not happen in every class, but when it does, then that day has been successful.

Adjustments and alterations with routine conversation and road maps

Lesson plans were changed, adjusted and altered to ease the communication in the classes for fluency to develop. A routine conversation between students and I was added in every plan. Some conversations included "Where did you go during the school break?", "What did you do this morning?" and "What do you like to do when you are outside?" among other questions as well as showing a road map of the objectives of each class for students to make predictions of what they might be learning. At first I was

apprehensive and unsure if this was a smart move since it was difficult to predict whether students would understand the questions or answer them. However, luckily the result was positive since many students volunteered to answer and surprisingly even the weak ones even though their answers weren't always in full sentences or grammatically correct, but it was a stepping stone towards the direction of developing fluency in communication. Despite of the success, whether a small one, the classroom setting of the daily conversation was still somewhat monological because of the way the students were seated.



In order for the communication to be effective, the classroom setting had to be altered to a dialogical one, but there was still some time before that was possible.

Situations and communications

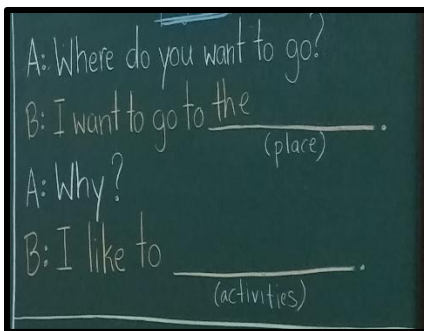
As term 4 arrived, the layout of the lesson plans was changed and the way every situational problem was approached was also significantly different from previous terms.

Earlier students collaboratively created many outputs as part of their situational

problems and also at times shared and exchanged their experiences of solving or doing those problems with their friends. However, in this term there wasn't as much creative art outputs, but the problems are more focused towards conversations where students would ask and answer to questions using the vocabulary of the lesson. This was a strategic move because the main content of the term was about places in the country and city as well as the activities done at those places. It would not be good or smart to simply teach the vocabulary and leave it just at that since students will immediately forget them once the lesson was over.

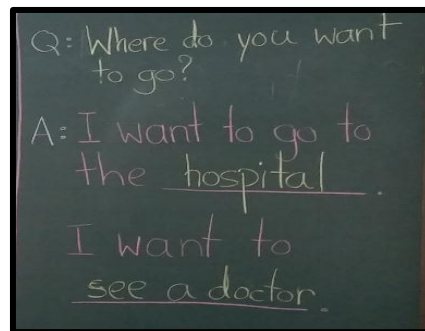
As the saying, 'practice makes perfect', this was what was needed in the classrooms for fluency to develop. Students weren't only taught the vocabulary, but there were also speaking drills conducted as part of a practice before students attempted the situational problems.

Here are some examples of the speaking drills conducted in the classroom:



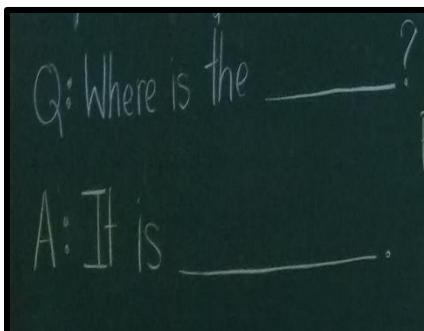
A: Where do you want to go?
B: I want to go to the _____.
(place)
A: Why?
B: I like to _____.
(activities)

Lesson 102



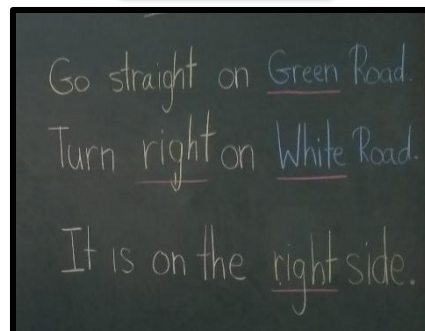
Q: Where do you want to go?
A: I want to go to the _____.
I want to see a doctor.

Lesson 402



Q: Where is the _____?
A: It is _____.

Lesson 502

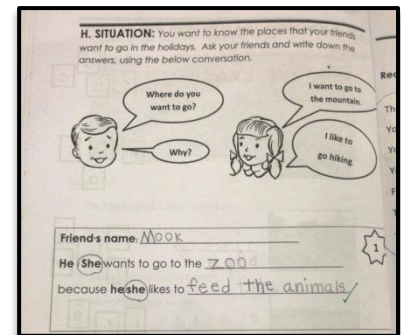
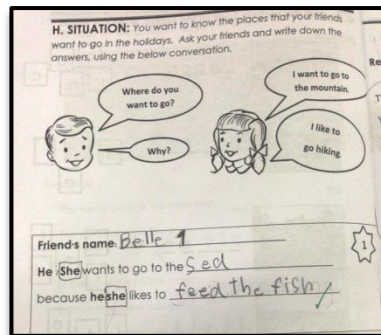
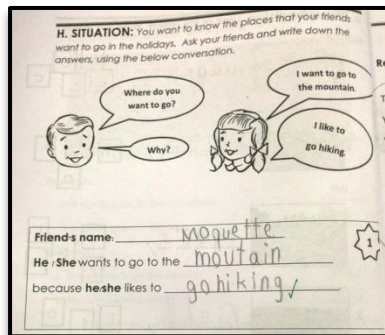


Go straight on Green Road.
Turn right on White Road.
It is on the right side.

Lesson 503

During week 1 and 2, after the drills were done, students paired up and did the situational problem. They asked, “Where do you want to go? Why?” and their partner answered. Then the answers were written in their workbook.

Here are some examples from the workbook activity:



While observing and listening to students, some students diligently asked the questions and answered, but there were also some who were more focused on writing the answers in the workbook and didn't attempt to do the conversation properly.

An excerpt from my lesson study after observing students in class 3:

For the situational problem, students only asked 1 friend due to the time left.

Some weak students were unable to follow the instructions and needed more explanation.

An excerpt from my lesson study after teaching students in class 4:

The conversation was first done as a class, then boys asked and girls answered and vice versa. Students were given a lot of time to practice before doing the activity by themselves, but there were some who still were unable to ask their friends the question.

Obstacles along the path

The plan didn't work and the expectation was not reached. As a result, the conversation drills were changed once again prior to every situational problem. Not only was the sentence structure written on the board and

volunteered called up to practice with me as an example, but another short drill was added before the main task. Students were chosen at random by picking a Popsicle stick that has one of the numbers from 1-30, which represented



each student in the class. At first when the Popsicle stick was picked, I stuck to the monological classroom setting where I asked the question and that one student answered, but after a few times then the shift occurred and the drill became dialogical because the rest of the students took charge in asking, while the lucky student answered.

This particular drill boosted students' confidence and was visible in another situational problem than the one previously mentioned. It did help that the sentence structure was similar, but the difference was the vocabulary. The previous vocabulary was based on places in the country, while this one was based on the places in the city. Students were motivated to speak in the activity after seeing their friends.

An excerpt from my lesson study after conducting the drill with students in class 1:

The game was conducted and it was a success, however the format of the game was changed where T. picked Popsicle sticks that had every Ss' number. This was exciting for Ss as they wanted to be picked or wanted their friends to be picked. When one Ss was picked, they would mention a place in the city, and then the rest of the class asked a follow up question "What do you do there?", then the Ss answered.

Grey clouds before a bright sunlight

In week 5, the daily conversations as well as the review of the places in the city and country along with their activities continued, but another topic was added. Students were now learning on how to give simple directions, like 'turn left on this road' and 'turn right on that road'. Furthermore, they had to incorporate the previous set of vocabulary with the new ones. There were plenty of practices before doing the group activity like walking along a real map to the places of their choice. This activity closely resembled a dialogical classroom since it was mostly student led, with minimal help from teacher.

Here are some of the examples of the activity, telling directions using a map:



Despite of the all the practices, there was one situational problem that didn't work out as expected. The task was for students to imagine that a stranger approached them and asked for a direction to a particular place. Students would then look at the map and give

the direction by incorporating the prepositions previously encountered as well as places in the city. Students in class 1 were the first group to do the task, but unfortunately it didn't go as successfully as planned. This was because students were not focused on asking and giving the directions, but rather they were more focused in writing down the directions. My goal since the beginning of the term was to let students develop fluency in communication so that they would be able to communicate in simple English in the real world as well. Seeing this I knew the plan had to be altered and after discussing with my buddy, T. Claire, we decided to change the activity slightly and more focused on communication. Instead of writing down the directions, students now solely had to ask the directions and give the directions. They were given a time interval of 3-4 minutes before the bell was rung, then partners were switched and the task was repeated. This was done a few times and the result in class 4 was significantly different from that of students in class 1. The atmosphere in class 4 indeed reflected the dialogical classroom I had envisioned and wanted to see happening in this term.

Here are some of the examples of the activity, telling directions using prepositions:



An excerpt from my lesson study after changing the situational problem in class 4:

T. drilled the sentence pattern a couple of times with the class and told them what they had to do. Students understood the rule, however many kept on asking if they had to write anything in the WB. They were surprised that this activity didn't require them to write anything in their WB. Students interviewed their friends using the sentence structure. Every time the bell rang, students changed their partner and diligently asked other friends.

Sky's the limit

Throughout the term the focus was to develop communicative fluency for grade 2 students. Successes were not always seen, but it was also not completely absent. In order for fluency to occur, a lot of practice needs to be done. This means that each lesson plans should have activities that allow for communication. It is true that grade 2 students have limited vocabulary to begin communicating with one another, but once they receive the practice then the sky's the limit. Minor changes in activities and a few successful situational problems are not a definite answer. In order to create a dialogical classroom where students can learn and communicate effectively, the lesson plans should involve action games to instill memory along with including communication patterns that can be used in the real world and not just stopping at communication patterns to be used inside the classroom.

